

Body, mind and beyond

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Transform
consciousness

THE UNKNOWABLE SELF

The deepest mystery of existence is the phenomenon of knowledge

■ By Osho

YOU CAN KNOW EVERYTHING except your own self. The knower cannot be known because to know something means to reduce it to an object. The very process of knowledge depends on duality. I can know you because I am here, inside, and you are there, outside. You become an object. But I cannot know my self because I cannot make my self an object. I cannot encounter my self in any objective way. I cannot put my self in front of me. And if I could put my self in front of me then that which is put in front of me would not be my self. How can that which can be put in front of me be my self? Really, the inner one which will look at it will remain my self.

Self is subjective and this subjectivity cannot be made objective. Hence, the paradox: that which knows all cannot know itself; that which is the source of all knowledge remains unknowable. You have heard, it has been preached, it has been told everywhere, "Know thyself." But how can you know your self? You can know everything other than you. One point will always remain unknown, unknowable. That point is you.

Self is not objective

The word self-knowledge is not good at all. Knowledge of the self is not possible. But this may create a deep pessimism in you. If knowledge of the self is not possible, then the whole of religion becomes absurd because this is what religion is meant to do—to give you self-knowledge. Then there must be some other meaning to the word self-knowledge. Then there must be something, a hidden dimension, through which you can know the self and still not make it an object. Knowledge must be possible in an altogether different sense. In the world, whatsoever we know is objective and the subject remains unknowable, the knower remains unknowable.

But can this knower be known? This is the basic question, the basic problem. If there is

only one way of knowing—that is objective knowledge—then it cannot be known. Hence, all the scientific thinkers will deny that the self exists. Their denial is meaningful. All those who are trained to think in terms of object, of objectivity, they will say there is no self. Their saying this means that they cannot conceive of another type of knowing. They think that there is only one type of knowing and that is objective. The self cannot be made objective; hence, it cannot be known. And that which cannot be known cannot be said to exist. How can you say that it exists? The moment you say that it exists you have said that you have known it. You cannot assert its existence. If it is not known, not only not known but also unknowable, then how can you say that it exists?

Scientists go on saying that there is no self, that man is a mechanism and the consciousness that appears is just an epiphenomenon, a by-product. They say that there is no self, there is no centre—that the consciousness comes into existence just through chemical phenomena and when the body withers away, consciousness disappears. So for science, death is total death; nothing remains after it. Consciousness is not substantial; it is a by-product. It cannot exist without the body. It is part of the body, just a combination of many material things. It comes into being; it is not elementary. It is a compound, a combination, a synthesis, something which depends on other things. There is no self. Science says there is no self because the self cannot be known.

Light is self-enlightening

The very word science means knowledge. And if something is unknowable, science will not approve of it, science will not agree to it. Science means that which can be known. Only then is science not mystical. It cannot fall into absurdities. For science, the very





IF A LAMP IS BURNING IN A DARK ROOM, EVERYTHING IN THE ROOM IS KNOWN THROUGH ITS LIGHT. BUT THE LAMP IS ALSO KNOWN BY ITS OWN LIGHT

word self-knowledge is absurd. But still, religion is meaningful because there is another dimension of knowing. Try to understand that dimension of knowing where the known is not reduced to an object. For instance, if a lamp is burning in a dark room, everything in the room is lighted, is known through the light of the lamp. But the lamp is also known by its own light. Everything else—chairs, furniture, the walls, paintings on the walls—they are known through the light. But through what is the light itself known?

The light is self-enlightening: just by its presence it reveals others and it reveals itself also. But these two revelations are different. When the chair is known through the light, the chair is an object. The light falls on it and if the light disappears the chair cannot be known. The knowledge of the chair depends on the light but the knowledge of the light itself doesn't depend on the chair. If you remove everything the light will still be light. There will be nothing to reveal but it will go on revealing itself. The revelation of the light is self-revelation.

Similar is the case with the inner phenomenon, the inner self. Everything is known through it but it itself is known not by anything else—it is a self-revealing phenomenon. It reveals itself. Self knowledge doesn't mean that the self is known by someone else because then that someone else will be the self. So whatsoever is known in an objective way cannot be the self. Always the knower will be the self. But how can this self be known? The self is a self-evident, self-revealing phenomenon; nothing else is needed to know it. You need not reduce it to an object.

Really, when all objects are removed from the mind, when all the furniture is removed from the mind, suddenly the self reveals itself. It is self-revealing. Really, that is the difference between matter and consciousness: matter is not self-revealing and consciousness is self-revealing; matter has to be known by someone else and consciousness knows itself.

That is the basic difference between matter and consciousness. There are trees but if there is no conscious being they cannot be revealed; they need someone's consciousness so that they can be revealed. There are rocks, beautiful rocks, but if there is no consciousness they will not be beautiful because then no one will become aware that they are there. Their existence will be mute. Even those rocks will not be able to know that they exist. Existence will be there but there will be no revelation of it.

A small child comes playing near the rock: suddenly the rock is revealed. Now it is not a mute existence. Through the child the rock has become assertive. Now the tree is revealed. Now everything around the child becomes alive in a new meaning. The child has become a source of revelation. Everything around him becomes alive. Hence, the deeper your consciousness, the deeper you reveal existence.

When a Buddha is born, the whole existence celebrates in him because of such a deep consciousness. All that is hidden in matter becomes manifest. It was never known before. Just by the presence of an enlightened person, the whole existence around him is enlightened. Everything becomes alive, feels through him. Consciousness reveals others, but there is no need to reveal it for another consciousness. It is self-revelatory.

Self needs no proof

Take it from another angle: everything needs proof because everything can be doubted. But you cannot doubt the self; therefore the self never needs any proof. Can you doubt the self? One of the great Western thinkers, Descartes, used doubt as a method to know. He started his journey of knowledge through doubt—a very penetrating doubt. He decided that he would doubt everything unless he stumbled upon a fact which could not be doubted. And unless there is a basic fact which cannot be doubted, you cannot build the palace of knowledge because there is no foundation stone to make it. If everything can be doubted and has to be proved, then the whole edifice is just logical.

Something deep down must be indubitable, which does not need any proof. God is

not indubitable. Remember this: God is not indubitable. He can be doubted—not only doubted, he can be disproved. And really, when someone doubts God you cannot prove his existence. You can only convince those who are already convinced, but you cannot convert a new man; that is impossible. Not a single atheist can be converted because he needs proof and you cannot prove God.

God is not indubitable. He can be doubted, rejected. The whole hypothesis can be said to be false. There is no proof that can help. So Descartes goes on discussing, inquiring, and he says that unless he comes to a point, to something in existence that is indubitable.... Not that it can be proved—no. Rather, it cannot be doubted. And ultimately he comes to the self and says that the self is a greater reality than God. It is, because the self cannot be doubted. Can you doubt it? Even to doubt it you will have to have it.

For example, if you are in the house and someone comes and asks whether you are in the house or not and you say, "I am not," the very fact that you say "I am not" will prove that you are there. You cannot deny yourself. The very fact that you say, "I am not" shows that you are there. The denial becomes the proof. There is no need not to affirm it; even denial becomes the proof. When even denial is a proof, the fact is indubitable. How can you doubt it?

You cannot say, "I do not know whether I am or not"—or can you? Even to be in such confusion, you need to be there. How can there be confusion without you? You cannot say, "I don't believe that I am," because even not to believe, someone is needed to be there. There is no way to deny that you exist, that the "I" exists.

The only indubitable fact

This self is the only indubitable fact in the world; everything else has been doubted. There have been skeptics who have doubted everything, even ordinary things of which you cannot conceive how they can be doubted. You are here but the English philosopher Berkeley says, "I cannot believe that you are here. You may be just a dream. And there is

no way to prove that you are not a dream, because when I dream, I dream of people such as you." And this is one of the essential qualities of a dream: in a dream the dream appears real. So if you are appearing real, Berkeley says that does not prove anything, because in every dream the dream appears real. Can you doubt while you are dreaming? You cannot: the dream appears real. Even a very absurd dream appears real. It is just illogical, irrelevant, but still it appears real while it is there. So Berkeley says that there is no way to prove whether you are real or not. You can be doubted, everything can be doubted.

One of the greatest Indian mystics, Nagarjuna, has doubted everything—everything! He says nothing is real because everything can be doubted. But there is only one point which he goes on avoiding: he never talks about the self because then his whole edifice, his whole philosophy, would fall down—because that cannot be doubted. It can be asked of Nagarjuna, "Okay! The whole world is illusory and everything can be doubted, but who is this doubter? Do you doubt it—this doubter who denies the whole world?" The self is indubitable because it is self-evident. No proof is needed, no argument is needed. It is self-evident. Mahavira denied God: he said there is no God. But he couldn't say there is no self. Then the very self became divine for him. He said, "Only the self is God." And that is true: in you, the self is the nearest thing to divine existence. That is why it cannot be doubted. It is self-evident, self-revealing, self-enlightening.

This is the second way of knowing. The scientific way is to know a thing as an object. The religious way is to know the subject as the subject. In a scientific way, knowledge has three parts: the knower, the known and the knowledge. The knowledge is just a bridge between the knower and the known. But the religious knowing does not have three parts. The knower is the known and the knower is the knowledge. This knowing is not divided into three. It is one, it is undivided.

*Excerpted from The Supreme Doctrine
Courtesy: Osho International Foundation; osho.com*



Osho was never born and never died. He only visited this planet earth between 11 December 1931 and 19 January 1990. He was a charismatic and gifted speaker who became the leader of a worldwide new spiritual movement.

